THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME

A REPORT ON COLLABORATION, CHALLENGES, AND CHANGE

2024

This report examines the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme, spotlighting the critical roles of Centrala, Birmingham City Council, and the University of Birmingham in spearheading innovative and compassionate responses to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. A significant aspect of this collaborative effort involves the integration of insights from Professor Sara Jones and Dr Natalia Kogut at the University of Birmingham with the cultural and social initiatives led by Centrala. Their collective work comprehensively analyses the scheme's successes and challenges. It is enriched by data from the Office for National Statistics on visa holders' experiences and aspirations and further augmented by academic research on the integration processes affecting Ukrainian refugees.

The Ukrainian refugee emergency has prompted a significant humanitarian response in the UK, culminating in the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme. The report delves into the intricacies of implementation, exploring refugee experiences, the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms, and the notable efforts of Centrala and the Birmingham City Council. Subsequently, Professor Sara Jones and Dr. Natalia Kogut from the University of Birmingham conducted thorough evaluations of these support systems. Integral to this discussion is the involvement of civil society, notably illuminated by Dr Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz's insights into the instrumental role of Central-Eastern European communities in the integration process. His analysis, alongside the contrasting experiences with Poland's response in 2022, offers invaluable lessons on fostering adaptation and integration, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of refugee support and community engagement.

The collaborative efforts of Centrala and Birmingham City Council, enriched by the academic insights of Professor Sara Jones and Dr Natalia Kogut from the University of Birmingham, along with Dr Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz, demonstrate the impactful union of community, academia, and government in addressing the Ukrainian refugee emergency. By integrating these contributors' diverse perspectives and expertise, this report not only underscores their pivotal roles but also stresses the necessity of adopting the outlined recommendations to ensure the success and sustainability of the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme. Through a lens that values academic research and practical initiatives, the report advocates for a holistic approach to refugee support, emphasising the importance of cultural and social integration in fostering a welcoming environment for Ukrainian refugees in the UK.

Centrala | Birmingham City Council | bvsc the centre for voluntary action | University of Birmingham

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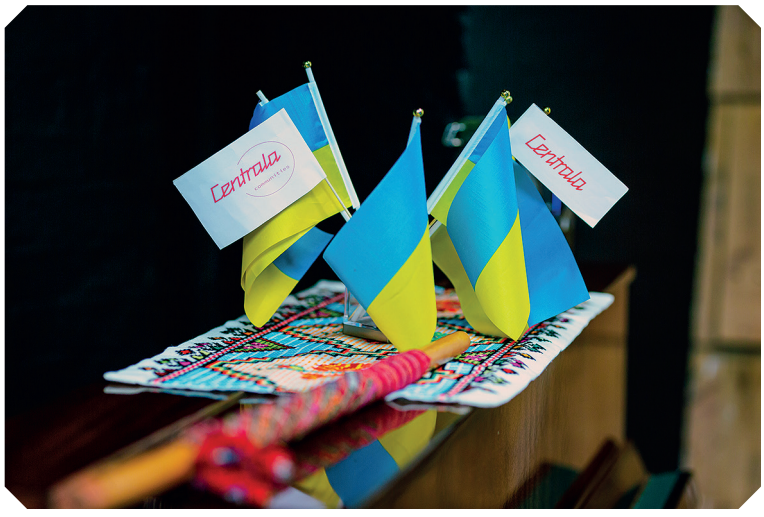
SOLIDARITY IN CRISIS:
CENTRALA'S RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE EMERGENCY IN THE WAKE OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION

ALICJA KACZMAREK, DIRECTOR OF CENTRALA

In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Centrala, in close collaboration with Birmingham City Council, has risen to become a cornerstone of support for Ukrainian refugees in Birmingham. This partnership signifies a concerted effort to address the immediate needs of displaced individuals and families, combining the unique strengths of each entity to establish an impactful support system.

Central to our narrative is the dual emphasis on Centrala's unwavering support for Ukrainian refugees and Birmingham City Council's pivotal role in rolling out the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme. The evaluation by Professor Sara Jones and Dr Natalia Kogut from the University of Birmingham provides essential insights, highlighting the scheme's effectiveness and areas for enhancement.



Centrala's involvement showcases a multifaceted strategy that extends well beyond conventional aid and is rooted in community engagement. Our response was immediate and tailored to the specific needs of Ukrainians and Eastern Europeans. Our responses included the involvement of communities already based in Birmingham and were correlated with them. From the beginning, our focus was on meeting the immediate practical needs of arriving Ukrainians and providing holistic wellbeing support to traumatised communities. Based on our over 10 years' experience, we have designed interventions that specifically support refugees and migrants, understanding the cultural, political, and historical context, and to integrate newly arriving Ukrainians into society, avoiding isolation and marginalisation. In particular, we have focused on the following:

FUNDRAISING: Centrala organised a fundraiser to gather financial support critical for immediate relief efforts, such as food, shelter, and medical assistance in the border countries with Ukraine.

AWARENESS RAISING: On the 2nd of March 2022, we opened an exhibition presenting images and stories of people who directly experienced the war, presenting the atrocities of the conflict and the extent of trauma caused by it.

CULTURAL SUPPORT: Understanding the significance of cultural identity, Centrala curated events celebrating Ukrainian culture, especially in times of turmoil. These encompassed art exhibitions, music performances, and workshops, allowing refugees to connect with their heritage and share it with the Birmingham community.

YOUTH SUPPORT: Recognising the specific needs of younger refugees, Centrala created a youth group. This initiative provided a supportive environment for young people to connect, share experiences, and engage in activities geared towards mental well-being and social integration.

PROVIDING ADVICE AND INFORMATION: Centrala enabled navigation of the complexities of immigration and legal status, working with partners from legal services; access to education for children and English language for all.

SUPPORT IN INTEGRATION: Centrala provided information sessions and workshops on understanding life in the UK, diversity, rights and responsibilities, community life, and opportunities available in the UK.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT: Acknowledging the profound psychological impact of war and displacement, Centrala has provided mental health sessions and counselling services to address trauma, anxiety, and other mental health challenges faced by the refugee population. This vital support helps individuals and families navigate their experiences, promoting resilience and recovery in the face of adversity.

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE EDUCATION: Beyond mere celebrations, Centrala has also embarked on educational initiatives aimed at deepening the understanding and appreciation of Ukrainian history, art, and traditions among both refugees and the local community. These efforts foster a greater sense of belonging and cultural connectivity, enriching the multicultural tapestry of Birmingham.

Centrala has offered this support using its own resources and existing structure, and by working collectively with other CEE groups and communities, building solidarity and voluntary action. We have moved to provide support in the form of projects once funding was enabled by Birmingham City Council.

Our collaborative efforts have elevated our response to a national level, facilitating engagements with government ministers and a notable meeting with Prime Minister Boris Johnson for Centrala and a group of Ukrainian refugees. This recognition, combined with Birmingham City Council's strategy to engage diverse and experienced voices through grant funding, underscores the essential role of community organisations and academic contributions in crisis response.

Throughout this crisis, Centrala has exemplified the indispensable role of community organisations in humanitarian emergencies, highlighting the necessity of swift action, adaptability, and effective support to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need. Similarly to other CEE organisations across the country, we have utilised existing connections, relationships, and knowledge about the needs of arriving communities. Initially, the response in Birmingham and nationally did not prioritise this expertise, resulting in mainly contracting large refugee organisations historically used to provide resettlement services. We believe that support deriving from within communities should be equally valued and recognised in situations when quick and appropriate interventions are needed in times of crisis.

This narrative, enriched by the specialised input from Professor Jones, Dr Kogut, and Dr Roch Dunin-Wasowicz and supported by Birmingham City Council and national government, lays a foundation for thoughtful policy development. Moving forward, the insights gained from this collaboration will serve as guiding principles for future actions and policies, ensuring that the needs of refugees and displaced individuals are met with empathy, efficiency, and extensive support.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two years on from the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme ("Homes for Ukraine") has provided a safe route for Ukrainians fleeing the war to travel to and settle in Birmingham. The Homes for Ukraine scheme has successfully provided shelter for many families and individuals fleeing war and in many cases has supported the integration of displaced Ukrainians into local communities and fostered lasting friendships. Nonetheless, our evaluation of the scheme and its implementation in the city raises several issues and concerns, which should be addressed if this scheme is to be continued or provide a model for other resettlement programmes.

- Questions were raised by both visa holders and hosts regarding the distribution of funds to support new arrivals. Support offered by the City Council and its (then) major contractor Refugee Action was often delayed and did not meet the needs of this specific group. The gap in support was frequently filled by smaller local organisations, especially those with a connection to migrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

- Several hosts report a lack of information for new arrivals on life in the UK and accessing key services. Hosts often stepped in to provide this support. This situation risks burnout for those attempting to support new arrivals and can create a guest/host dynamic that does not allow visa holders agency over their lives.

- Those arriving in the UK were on average significantly more likely to be degree-educated than the general population in Ukraine. This raises concerns about inbuilt bias in a scheme that requires would-be visa holders to be selected by a UK host.

- There is evidence of "Eastern Europeanism" (stereotyping of East Europe as underdeveloped and Eastern Europeans as low-skilled) across the experience of Ukrainian visa holders in terms of interpersonal relationships and access to housing and employment. This stereotyping has a negative impact on integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The need for culturally specific expertise and hands-on support should be taken into account in future decisions around the allocation of funds. Specifically, existing Central and Eastern European groups and organisations are in a prime position to welcome and support people based on a fuller understanding of culture and context and (in many cases) relevant linguistic expertise.

2. New arrivals should be provided with a written welcome pack in Ukrainian/ Russian that provides clear information on access to services. Such information is available, but it is unclear if it is culturally informed and systematically offered to visa holders.

3. Hosts should be given clearer and more accessible guidance on what support is expected from them and when they should instead direct visa holders to qualified bodies.

4. Information should be provided to hosts and others supporting Ukrainian arrivals on what "Eastern Europeanism" is and how it can manifest in interpersonal relationships and access to housing, work and healthcare.

5. Information and support provided to new arrivals should meet them "where they are", taking into account that the majority of visa holders are degree-qualified and have worked in high-skilled professions.

6. Further research should be undertaken on the accessibility of the scheme to all affected by the war in Ukraine.

OVERVIEW

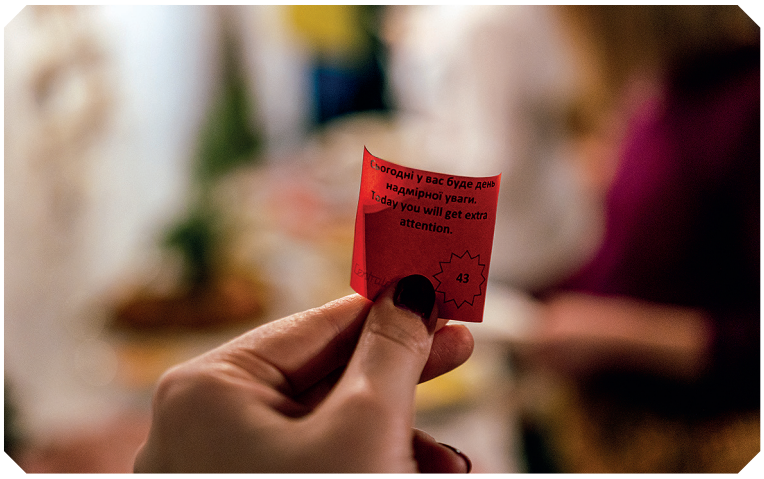
Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the UK government created brand new schemes for Ukrainians displaced by the war to find refuge in the UK. These were the Ukraine Extension Scheme (for those already in the UK), Ukraine Family Scheme (now closed to new applicants), and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme ("Homes for Ukraine").

Homes for Ukraine has been by far the most commonly used route for Ukrainians travelling to the UK with 181,300 visas issued nationally as of 5 March 2024 (Home Office, 2024).

As of October 2023, Birmingham City Council records the arrival of 945 Ukrainian guests from a total of 520 households. Of this number 265 are children, 489 are women, and 191 are men. The scheme allows Ukrainians to travel, live, work and claim benefits in the UK for up to 3 years where they have a named sponsor willing to offer them appropriate accommodation for a (theoretical) minimum of 6 months. The sponsors receive a "thank you" payment of £350/month, rising to £500/month after 12 months. Birmingham City Council started providing a "top up thank you" payment for hosts in the first 12 months since November 2022 increasing the monthly payment between £500 to £600 per month depending on the guests' group size.

Birmingham City Council also provides a "move on" fund offering grants of £3000-£4000 to displaced Ukrainians based in Birmingham who are ready to move on from their sponsorship arrangements and into their own accommodation. The grant can cover the costs of rental deposits, furniture, white goods, household goods, moving costs, and initial bills (Birmingham City Council, 2023a).

An unknown number of Ukrainians have also arrived in the city via the other available visa routes. Ukrainians travelling via the Ukraine Family Scheme were not entitled to access many of the support measures put in place by the government (notably the "thank you" payments and the "move on fund").



CITY OF SANCTUARY

Birmingham prides itself on being a City of Sanctuary. Birmingham City Council received funding of around £10 million for the support of displaced Ukrainians. The principal contractor was the organisation Refugee Action, who had significant experience supporting displaced people from Syria and Afghanistan. Refugee Action was contracted to support Ukrainians and their hosts in the early stages of the sponsorship arrangement. The contract with Refugee Action was the subject of a scrutiny investigation following complaints by sponsors and visa holders around the level of service provided and was subsequently terminated (Haynes, 2022).

The Council recommissioned the services in August 2023 taking into account the feedback following the scrutiny process and currently works in partnership with Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) and Spring Housing to deliver support for Homes for Ukraine arrivals and their hosts. RMC provides initial orientation and integration services, and Spring Housing delivers tenancy and family support when guests are ready to move on (Birmingham City Council, 2023b). The service now includes an out-of-hours support service. Several smaller organisations provided and continue to provide crucial community-level support to displaced Ukrainians in the city; for example, Moseley for Ukraine, Sunflower Sisters, North Birmingham for Ukraine, Bosnia House, and Centrala . Learning from Poland, in particular indicates that a decentralised loose coalition of smaller civil society and non-government organisations with grassroots knowledge and experience often provides the most effective support for displaced people (see Roch Dunun-Wąsowicz in this report). Birmingham City Council has recognised the roles of these grassroots organisations and has grant funded most of the above-mentioned organisations to provide such support. A number of toolkits have been developed to help Ukrainians and their hosts, including by the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham (Homes for Ukraine, 2024).

INTEGRATION AND "EASTERN EUROPEANISM"

The support provided to displaced Ukrainians (including Homes for Ukraine) can be viewed as contributing to efforts to support integration. This term is much debated in migration research, especially regarding the concept of socio-cultural integration. Integration may imply that the migrant is required to adapt completely to the norms of the majority population of the country to which they are moving. This ignores the fact that host societies are already diverse, and it places the onus on the individual migrant to change, rather than addressing racist structures within the host society (e.g., Saharso, 2019).

Socio-economic measures – such as housing, employment, and education – are therefore better markers of successful integration than socio-cultural ones. Successful integration by these measures requires adaptation on the part of both the individual and institutions. It demands reflection on how racism and stereotyping in the host country can impact the ability of migrants and refugees to integrate.

For displaced Ukrainians, this means recognition of stereotypes associated with "Eastern Europe" and "Eastern European" migrants. Research demonstrates that migrants from Central and Eastern Europe face a complex form of discrimination that has been termed "Eastern Europeanism" (Kalmar, 2022). Eastern Europeanism positions countries in Europe's East as backward and in a permanent state of transition. Migrants from those countries are typecast as low-skilled, poor, and uneducated (the stereotype of the "Polish plumber" or "Romanian cleaner") (Bulat, 2019). Researchers at the University of Birmingham have shown how this stereotyping has impacted displaced Ukrainians in diverse ways in the sphere of housing, employment, and access to services (Galpin et al., 2023).

We explore these aspects further focusing on Birmingham in the context of the national picture. The report integrates existing research on the scheme, interviews with visa holders and hosts, national-level statistics provided by the ONS, and the results of a small-scale survey.

SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Local hosts consistently report that centralised support (from Birmingham City Council and its then main contractor Refugee Action), especially in the initial stages of the hosting arrangement, was delayed, patchy, inadequate, or sometimes completely absent. One put it succinctly:

> "Refugee Action, you would assume that they would understand what it means concerning refugees and everything around it. How can they say that they had to spend three months training people?"

In January and February 2023, we conducted a small-scale qualitative survey within Birmingham to measure satisfaction with the support provided by different organisations. Of the 91 Ukrainians responding to the survey, 32% said that Refugee Action had not contacted them by that point. Only 16% of respondents stated that they had received fully the support they expected from Refugee Action and 34% completely disagreed that they had received the expected support. It is notable that the hosts we interviewed following the termination of the contract with Refugee Action and the start of the work by Refugee and Migrant Centre were now more satisfied with the support available. One host interviewed in February 2024 stated:

> "Things have massively improved since the start. When they [the Ukrainian visa holders] first came, there was virtually nothing. I was more or less by myself".

The interviews with hosts make clear that initial support came instead from two sources: smaller and/or local organisations, especially those run by and for Central and Eastern Europeans, and the hosts themselves. Interviewees name in particular: Moseley for Ukraine/Moseley Hive, North Birmingham for Ukraine, Centrala, Sunflower Sisters, and hubs such as Sutton Coldfield Library and Harbourne Baptist Church. These organisations are reported as providing matching services, ESOL classes, counselling, community groups, and general advice and support.

The most recent national-level data (published October 2023) indicates that the vast majority (98%) of hosts are providing support well beyond accommodation, including help accessing services (80%), transport (68%), help settling into the community (66%), emotional support (66%), help finding work (61%), and shopping for groceries (59%) (ONS, 2023a).

This is also reflected in our interviews with hosts in the Birmingham area who report stepping in to find school places for children in the household, support with registering for NHS services, and integration into community activities (e.g., children's swimming lessons). The hosts we spoke to were happy to offer this support but frustrated that more was not available from central services. One noted the difficulty in accessing advice about benefits, adding: "We've never needed to claim Universal Credit, so we wouldn't know where to start".

Not only is this an additional burden on hosts, who may quickly burn out and withdraw from the scheme, it also poses risks to visa holders who are reliant on the support of (mostly) untrained individuals around crucial questions of access to services and benefits. This can – as Burrell has recently argued – create a hierarchical dynamic of "responsible hosts, dependent guests" (Burrell, 2024: 11). One of the hosts we interviewed recognised the challenge of becoming suddenly reliant on a complete stranger and the paternalism of some hosts: "She [the Ukrainian visa holder] is not a child, she's a grown woman. When she feels able, she'll do these things for herself". Others noted that a key challenge was the lack of mental health support for Ukrainians, something that they did not feel qualified to provide themselves.

A key concern for almost all Ukrainians that we have spoken to is access to healthcare. Many have been surprised by long waiting times and the quality of medical services in the UK. Others report that UK doctors have not accepted their reports of prior diagnoses made in Ukraine. The most recent national statistics indicate that of the 32% of visa holders who were receiving regular healthcare treatment in Ukraine, 70% are not receiving this treatment in the UK (ONS, 2023c). Kang et al. demonstrate that difficulty accessing healthcare can be a significant source of additional stress

for displaced people and exacerbate mental health problems (Tarandeep et al., 2023). Ukrainians report that their health has worsened since their arrival in the UK and that they would have benefited from more accessible and culturally relevant information about how to navigate the UK health service (Poppleton et al., 2023). It is this kind of culturally informed and specialised support that organisations run by and for individuals with experience of migration from Europe's East are better equipped to provide.

CASE STUDY 1: OLGA

Olga, 47, arrived in the UK with two children and lived on a farm with her host family. It was hard to get to the city and school. The relationship with her hosts broke down, as the hosts were constantly entering the room allocated to her and her children uninvited, which she perceived as an invasion of privacy. It was very hard to match with new hosts, which she eventually did, as renting by herself with two children wasn't possible.

Olga has struggled with access to medicine as doctors do not take her complaints seriously and do not accept diagnoses from Ukrainian doctors. She had problems with her leg, but her doctor diagnosed depression. She is now afraid of losing mobility in a foreign country with two children.

CASE STUDY 2: ALONA

Alona, 37, arrived in the UK with two children and her mother. One child is seriously sick; she chose the UK as heard about a clinic that treats the particular illness suffered by her child. However, for six months, she has been unable to get to the specialised doctor in that clinic.

She had a kind host but there was very little space for four people. She is doing very well as she managed to learn English from scratch to such a level that she has got a part-time job in a high-skilled sector. In addition, she started renting a house from a private landlord.

HOUSING AND HOSTS

Data provided by Birmingham City Council indicates that, as of Jan 2024, 186 Ukrainian households in the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme reported moving into private accommodation with 123 families making use of the "move on" funding. There are 212 families (354 individuals, including children) still living with hosts in the city.

The hosts that we interviewed indicate that the matching process was rather ad hoc and decentralised: they met their guests through organisations such as Moseley for Ukraine and Sunflower Sisters. In one case, the match came about because the visa holder was desperate to leave an abusive situation. Questions around safeguarding within the Homes for Ukraine scheme have been raised at a national level, although risks have been designated low or moderate (National Audit Office, 2023).

Beyond safeguarding, there are also concerns that the approach of hosts selecting guests embeds the potential for discrimination and unconscious bias into the system, as "those deemed safe enough to enfold into community spaces are offered more generous support" (Burrell, 2024: 5). Tang et al. (2023) note that people who are well-resourced and enjoy better health are more likely to be mobile and move greater distances. Further research is needed to explore the demographics of those able to travel to the UK. However, the most recent national-level statistics show that 74% of visa holders are educated to at least degree level, whereas national statistics for Ukraine show that in 2021 only 58% of those aged 30-34 years had completed tertiary education (ONS, 2023c; Eurostat, 2023).

The hosts that we interviewed reported a generally positive experience with hosting, but also several moments of friction, especially relating to intercultural understanding (e.g., around raising children). The most recent national data (ONS, 2023a) suggests that 48% of those surveyed still have guests whereas 52% do not. This is a significant decrease from the data provided in November 2022 when 74% of those surveyed still had guests. Of those who currently do not have guests 47% would not host again. In November 2022, 73% of former hosts stated that they would not host again (ONS, 2022).

This indicates that the respondents to the 2023 survey on the whole had more satisfactory experiences with hosting than those answering the survey in 2022. Notably, the 2023 respondents were engaging in longer hosting arrangements with most (79%) hosting for more than six months (60% in 2022). The 2022 data can therefore give us an indication of challenges in the early period of the hosting arrangement and is useful to consider alongside the 2023 data.

An important statistic in these data sets relates to the reason for hosting arrangements coming to an end. In 2022, 11% of those currently hosting but who have hosted other guests previously stated that the previous arrangement ended because of a breakdown in the relationship between sponsor and guests. For those who chose not to host again, this figure is 21%. In the 2023 data, relationship breakdown is given as a reason for the end of a prior hosting arrangement by 4% of those currently hosting, and 9% of those who have had guests but were not hosting at the time of the survey. 67% of the 2023 respondents stated that a strong relationship with guests is the reason that they intend the sponsorship arrangement to last more than 18 months.

These figures indicate that relationship breakdown may cause hosting arrangements to end and – importantly – put sponsors off hosting future guests. We therefore need to take seriously the reporting by previous sponsors of friction with guests (40% in 2022; 20% in 2023) and challenging cultural differences (only reported in 2023 data, 28%).

Disagreements between sponsors and guests have been reported to us frequently in the course of our work with displaced Ukrainians in Birmingham. These can have a myriad of causes: difficulty working out household rules; misunderstandings relating to the "thank you" payment and agreeing the financial contribution of guests; different approaches to, for example, parenting and mealtimes; and sometimes an overinvolvement on the part of hosts in the lives of their guests, which – as noted above – can be perceived as controlling.

The University of Birmingham report cited above indicates Eastern Europeanism and a lack of knowledge about the history of the region can exacerbate tensions between sponsors and guests (Galpin et al., 2023). A significant percentage of both cohorts of sponsors in the ONS surveys state that more information about Ukraine and Ukrainian culture would support the hosting arrangement (42% in 2022; 25% in 2023). It was also something that was called for in our interviews with local hosts. This highlights the need for those working with sponsors and visa holders to have good knowledge of both Ukraine and the kinds of stereotyping Ukrainians may face in the UK and speaks again to the importance of involving organisations run by and for Eastern Europeans.

Following the end of sponsorship arrangements for any reason, 26% of current sponsors in the most recent ONS survey helped their guests find alternative accommodation. At a national level, the hosts reported numerous difficulties helping guests access private rented accommodation: affordability (66%), lack of guarantor (50%), lack of suitable properties (43%), the need for unmanageable upfront payments (42%), lack of references (39%) and refusal to rent to recipients of benefits (33%). 31% note that guests experienced bias or discrimination from landlords or estate agencies (ONS, 2023a). These difficulties are also reported by our interviewees where they have tried to support their guests at the end of the hosting arrangement. One noted that the advice they received from both Spring Housing and Birmingham City Council was to look in the private sector. Another commented that there is a great deal of unsuitable accommodation being offered and that some Ukrainians felt under immense pressure to accept it for want of any centralised support. Notably these interviews took place before the introduction of the "move on" fund. Hosts interviewed more recently emphasised the importance of the "move on" fund in mitigating some of these issues, though pointed towards the need for a guarantor as an ongoing problem.

CASE STUDY 3: ANNA

Anna, 45, **arrived in the UK in June 2022 under the Homes for Ukraine scheme with her son. The family came from the East of Ukraine where the humanitarian situation and bombing are the most acute. She lived in the host's house initially, but suffered abusive behaviour, being unable even to use goods that she had bought herself.**

Anna's English is not very good and she struggled to find a job despite having two degrees and being highly experienced in her field. Instead, she was studying English at college almost 4 days a week.

Anna struggled to find accommodation at the end of the 6-month hosting arrangement. Eventually volunteers helped her to rent a flat from a private landlord. However, she struggled to get housing benefits because she could not provide bills in her name. She is struggling to survive on benefits. Her son is volunteering in the hope of finding a job in the future, but she currently has no funds to cover rental payments and bills.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment is a key indicator of economic integration. According to figures provided by Birmingham City Council in October 2023, approximately 30% of visa holders in the city are employed, and 46% unemployed (with the employment status of the remaining percentage being unknown). As noted above, those who have moved to the UK via Homes for Ukraine are – on average – highly qualified. 77% were employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine and the most common areas of employment for this group were teaching and education (12%), IT and communication (12%), retail (12%) and financial services (10%) (ONS, 2023c).

The ONS survey data with Ukrainian visa holders in the UK published in April 2023 asks about barriers to gaining employment in the UK: respondents indicate that these are: English language skills (54%); finding a job close to where they live (37%); lack of adequate transport (26%); qualifications not being recognised in the UK (24%); not finding a job with suitable hours (23%); and not finding a job that matches their skills (22%) (ONS, 2023b).

The difficulties in accessing work that matches qualifications and skills is a familiar pattern for previous movers from Eastern Europe (Johnston, Khattab & Manley, 2015) and suggests that Eastern Europeanism may also be at play here. In this context, in the most recent survey (published July 2023), many visa holders report a change in sector from those reported above to food production, agriculture and hospitality – that is, from sectors that tend to be high-skilled to those that tend to be low-skilled (ONS, 2023c).

This is reflected in the report by the University of Birmingham (Galpin et al., 2023) and in our interviews with hosts, who express their frustration that the skills of their guests are not being utilised effectively in the UK. One notes that British qualifications have currency all over the world, but their Ukrainian guest is struggling to have her Ukrainian degree recognised in the UK. They add that Ukrainians are offered only cleaning work despite having high-powered and high-skilled jobs in Ukraine. More than one host notes that their Ukrainian guest is a qualified educator, but that their qualifications have not been recognised, despite being in short supply. One host recalls that their guest was sent on a course that was clearly designed for those with little to no experience of work and was completely inappropriate in terms of the level of information and advice provided (e.g., filling in basic forms or what to wear for an interview). We can see this as a further example of how Eastern Europeanism impedes economic integration of this group. Since September 2023, the government has provided advice on converting one's Ukrainian qualifications (Gov.uk, 2023); however, it is not clear how widely this information is known about or taken into account by employers (Benson, Sigona & Zambelli, 2024).

CASE STUDY 4: OKSANA

Oksana, 42, arrived in the UK with two children. Her hosts supported her and helped with finding school places. But she is struggling to find a job because her diplomas stayed in occupied territory in Ukraine. She does not consider that the Job Centre supports her adequately. The only thing that is offered to her is cleaning.

Oksana struggles with English and finds it helpful that courses of English are free and available. However, she struggles with childcare after 3 p.m. as there is no wraparound care at the school. This makes it hard to find a job. Benefits are not enough to start living independently.

*All names have been changed.

Centrala with Professor Sara Jones and Dr Natalia Kogut (University of Birmingham)

CIVIL SOCIETY & INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES: LESSONS FROM THE FRONTLINE

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In the United Kingdom, Ukrainian refugees have been granted a wide array of social and economic rights, facilitating their long-term integration into the host society (Machin, 2023). Similar measures have been adopted in Poland, which, as a frontline country, faced a substantial challenge in 2022. There are valuable lessons to be drawn from Poland's experience in the long-term adaptation of war refugees.

While in Poland, the initial humanitarian relief efforts were driven by self-organized, adaptable civic ecosystems, it is civil society that has played a pivotal role in fostering the growing social and economic independence of refugees. It remains the cornerstone for the ongoing integration of Ukrainians in the long run. Consequently, it is suggested that the human and social capital of Central-Eastern Europeans in the UK, along with the immigrant organizations that have developed since 2004, should be leveraged to support the adaptation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Britain.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE "HOMES FOR UKRAINE" SCHEME.

Recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023c) regarding visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes in 2023 reveals some intriguing insights. A significant majority of adults (70%) reported a "somewhat strong" or "very strong" personal connection to the UK. Half of them expressed an intention to reside in the UK even after it is safe to return to Ukraine, with only 28% desiring to return. Among their reasons, 60% cited better economic opportunities in Britain, as well as a preference for living in an English-speaking country and a better quality of life overall. Additionally, the study found that adults under the Homes for Ukraine scheme were largely satisfied with their living conditions (92%), though only 55% were employed in the UK. Notably, many of these visa holders had shifted to different sectors in the UK compared to their previous employment in Ukraine, often in roles below their qualifications.

Machin (2023) commends the support provided but calls for additional funding for local authorities and the voluntary sector to address the housing, health, and financial needs of Ukrainian refugees. While the existing provisions serve as a useful starting point, establishing long-term settlement arrangements and a robust safety net is deemed essential for effective refugee support in the future. Similarly, Vicol and Sehic (2022) highlight the central role played by local authorities in refugee integration, an aspect that has received insufficient attention. Their report identifies pressing issues, including the lack of a data validation mechanism, poor communication between central and local governments, and disparities in financial support under different visa schemes for Ukrainian refugees. To ensure successful long-term integration, the report emphasizes the need for the UK government to address structural challenges, such as the shortage of affordable housing and

overreliance on sponsors for housing, which puts refugees at risk of homelessness and social immobility. A lack of clear guidance from Whitehall has resulted in varying responses from individual local authorities when supporting refugees in the private rented sector. Vicol and Sehic call for a comprehensive strategy for refugee integration that transcends short-term scheme-based responses and accounts for the local realities of refugee settlement (2023). Furthermore, Draper-Orr (2023) raises concerns about the £350 per month provided by the UK Government to sponsors of refugees, stating that it has been insufficient to cover increased living costs and could strain the relationships between refugees and their sponsors.

Collectively, these studies underscore the critical importance of ongoing support, suitable accommodation, and effective funding mechanisms to ensure the successful integration and well-being of Ukrainian refugees in the UK at both central and local levels. Meaningful input and collaboration with independent civil society, including NGOs, charities, and voluntary associations, are deemed indispensable in developing a comprehensive and effective approach to refugee settlement. By drawing lessons from the experiences of Polish civil society, the UK can work towards creating a more holistic and sustainable framework for refugee integration, wherein both the UK government and local authorities play pivotal roles, and the active engagement of civil society, which possesses prior familiarity with Central-Eastern Europeans and their issues, is harnessed.

INITIAL HUMANITARIAN RELIEF & LONG-TERM ADAPTATION OF REFUGEES IN POLAND

In Poland, 2022 witnessed the largest refugee relief effort since World War II, with eight million individuals entering the country's territory (Duszczyk et al., 2023). This humanitarian mobilization was unprecedented, with an astounding 73.5% of Poles actively supporting humanitarian actions in 2022 (Kantar, 2022). In the initial hours, days, and weeks of the relief effort, a diverse array of local groups, activists, and entrepreneurs formed unique alliances and worked collaboratively to provide humanitarian relief, including food, clothing, transport, shelter, and legal support. Subsequently, they engaged with local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations (IOs), and the state (Hargrave, Homel, & Dražanová, 2022; Czerska-Shaw, 2022; Czerska-Shaw, Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska, & Mucha, 2023). Interestingly, Poland's central government appeared to play a limited role in the initial humanitarian response during these early stages of refugee relief efforts (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022; Mikulska, 2022; Duszczyk, 2023). However, this initial bottom-up mobilization was not purely spontaneous; it was built upon pre-existing civic ecosystems in Poland, providing the necessary human capital, grassroots knowledge, and informal relationships that facilitated new connections between actors beyond the migrant-focused milieu (Pankowski, Czerska-Shaw, Rangelov, 2022; Rangelov & Theros, 2023).

Emerging evidence sheds light on the social and economic adjustment of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. According to the Polish Economic Institute, within a single year, the number of Ukrainian firms established in Poland has exceeded 20,000, reflecting a significant surge in foreign investment from Ukraine (Baszczak et al., 2022). Ukrainian companies now comprise 25% of all foreign-capital companies in Poland, making them the dominant foreign investor in terms of quantity. Astonishingly, 54% of all foreign-funded economic activities in Poland are attributed to Ukrainian companies. The same study reveals that a substantial majority of entrepreneurs running businesses in Poland (approximately two-thirds) have opted not to return to Ukraine due to the conclusion of the war, instead choosing to further develop their activities in Poland (Baszczak et al., 2022). A study conducted by the Gdańsk University of Technology, exploring the preferences and job satisfaction of Ukrainian workers in Poland, indicated that 70% of respondents were uncertain about staying in Poland permanently, while 21% with families expressed a desire to stay permanently (2023). Only a negligible 2% considered migrating to another EU country. Significantly, 56% of respondents were learning Polish to enhance job opportunities, anticipating long-term residency.

Economic integration plays a pivotal role in successfully integrating immigrants, including refugees, into the host society. Duszczyk, Górny, Kaczmarczyk, and Kubisiak suggest that refugees face more challenges in accessing the labour market compared to economic migrants (2023). It takes time for refugees to attain a similar status to others due to employment restrictions during the international protection application process, which can last several years. Recently arrived refugees tend to concentrate in lower-level jobs and migrant niches resulting from involuntary migration and limited opportunities to invest in country-specific human capital. Their initial economic integration is impeded by a relative lack of social capital, particularly in terms of language skills and the transferability of their abilities. Women are disproportionately affected as well. In the case of Ukrainians within the EU, the provision of temporary protection enabled immediate entry into the labour market, allowing them to engage in various economic activities and facilitating their rapid integration into the economy. In Poland, the social connections built between the sending and receiving populations since the Euromaidan, along with linguistic proximity and a migrant-oriented civil society, have aided many Ukrainians in becoming economically active within a relatively short period.

HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL OF CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPEANS IN THE UK AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS. A KEY PARTNER IN ADAPTATION.

The human and social capital of Central-Eastern Europeans in the UK, along with their organizations, play a significant role in adaptation. Central-Eastern Europeans in the UK have become increasingly civically active, primarily due to significant post-2004 European mobility. Research on Polish immigrant organizations highlights the emergence of a new generation of civic organizations, shaped by increased generational and socio-economic diversity within the migrant community (Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2022). The decentralized and pragmatic approach of the British state in supporting migrants enabled these post-2004 organizations to address the specific needs of migrants locally, guided by charismatic leaders with substantial symbolic capital, even in the absence of social capital brought from Poland by the migrants. These organizations adopt a uniquely British approach, striving to empower Polish migrants both culturally and economically. They celebrate cultural heritage while providing essential socio-economic support, including English-language education, housing assistance, welfare, coaching, and legal advice. This holistic approach has enabled many migrant organizations to extend their services not only to underprivileged Poles but also to other Central and Eastern European migrants. Following the Brexit vote, Polish immigrant organizations played a crucial role as vital partners for local authorities in identifying the specific needs of this previously overlooked ethnic minority in the eyes of UK policy makers.

In response to the full-scale invasion, Polish entrepreneurs in the UK demonstrated solidarity with their counterparts in Poland by providing humanitarian relief. British-based Polish courier companies, in collaboration with Polish immigrant organizations and local Polish businesses (such as the White Eagle Club in Balham, London), organized couriers to transport donated goods collected in the UK. These donations were entirely collected by the Polish diaspora and then transported to distribution points in Poland before being sent to Ukraine. Polish immigrant organizations in the UK also mobilized resources and launched dedicated support

initiatives, regardless of the availability of aid funds. Several organizations, such as the East European Resource Centre, secured funding from independent donors, while others mobilized volunteers on a large scale. For instance, the Liverpool branch of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, established in 2022 by a small group of highly skilled Ukrainian workers who had migrated to the city, benefited from insights from Merseyside Polonia on how to assist new arrivals outside of the government's resettlement process. They collaborated with local authorities, including the Council and resettlement teams, as well as the Town Hall. The collaboration between the Polish and Ukrainian communities in Liverpool was born out of a shared commitment to support and integrate refugees into the local community. It is noteworthy that, to date, the major beneficiaries of public funds for assistance to Ukrainians have been large aid organizations like the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, and the British Red Cross, rather than the civil society of Central-Eastern Europeans that acted immediately after February 24, 2022.

As a result, the post-2004 generation of Polish and Central-Eastern European immigrant organizations and charities in the UK is ideally positioned to support the post-2022 Ukrainian refugees, particularly concerning English-language skills and economic empowerment. These organizations benefit from cultural and linguistic proximity, as well as a proven track record of inclusivity and cooperation with the British state, civil society, and the local community. Notably, organizations that have expanded beyond their ethno-national niche, such as SOS Polonia in Southampton, the East European Resource Centre in London, Merseyside Polonia in Liverpool, Centrala in Birmingham, and POMOC, are particularly well-equipped to assist Ukrainian refugees in collaboration with the emerging Ukrainian diasporic civil society. Drawing from the lessons learned by independent civil society, including the voluntary sector, and leveraging their existing resources, the UK government and local authorities can create a more complementary framework for supporting the integration and well-being of Ukrainian refugees.

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